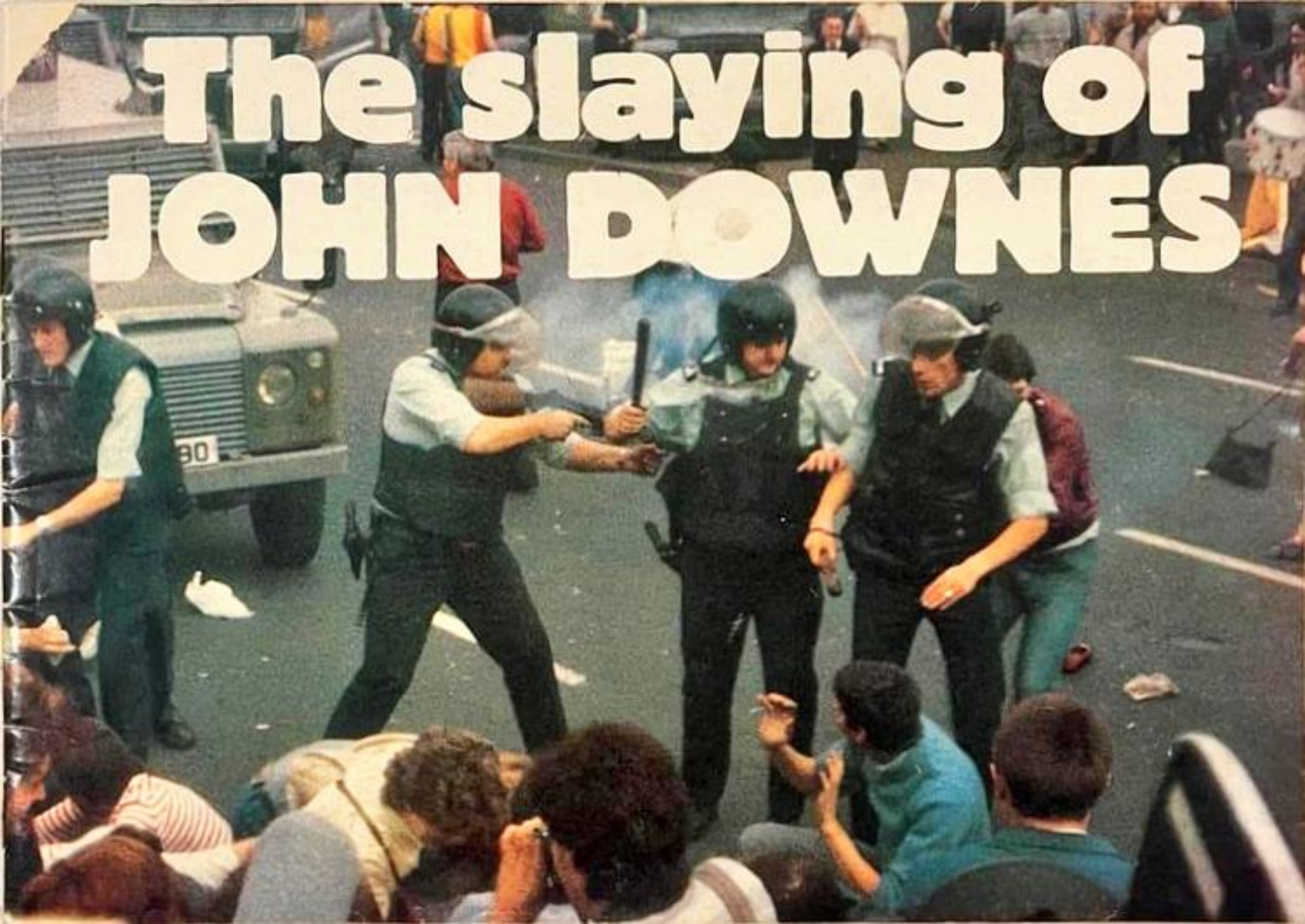
The slaying of JOHN DOWNES



The slaying of JOHN DOWNES

Issued by Sinn Fein Publicity Department
September 1984

Published by Republican Publications
44 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

John and Brenda Downes on their wedding day in 1983

"It was a massacre, it was an absolute, unprovoked massacre."

– Kathleen Livingstone, sister of 14-year-old Julie Livingstone, killed by a plastic bullet in May 1981

JOHN (SEAN) DOWNES, a young married man with an 18-month-old baby girl, lay dying, and dozens of men, women and children lay bleeding and battered. This was the immediate devastating aftermath of a deliberate, ruthless and ultimately unsuccessful RUC attempt to capture Martin Galvin, the banned Noraid spokesperson, at the annual Belfast anti-internment march and rally in August 1984.

John Downes* had come to attend a peaceful protest to demonstrate his personal opposition to British rule in Ireland. The August march, with its roots firmly entwined in the anti-internment protests of the early 1970s, has developed into the major anti-imperialist protest of the year and is attended by republicans and nationalists alike as well as various sympathetic overseas contingents such as the British Troops Out Movement and Irish Northern Aid (Noraid).

Thirty-three-year-old Martin Galvin has featured in anti-internment marches for over twelve years. He has acted as spokesperson for Noraid for five years. In 1983 Galvin was to meet the British Minister of State in the North, Nicholas Scott, who agreed in a radio interview to meet and discuss with the Noraid delegation the situation in the six counties. However, Scott was admonished by his seniors and by loyalists for agreeing to meet with republicans (thus breaching the government boycott) and he cancelled the proposed talks on the flimsiest of pretexts.

A lawyer by profession, Galvin has unequivocally supported the Irish people's struggle to be free of British rule. For expressing this viewpoint, and as part of the process of 'criminalising' this view, the British government banned Galvin, in a move which was also seen as a sop to loyalists.

However, to demonstrate his right of free speech, Galvin, with the help of Sinn Fein, defied the ban. The British government were determined that Galvin would not be allowed to appear or to speak and they instructed the RUC to monitor the Noraid tour throughout the six counties. Undoubtedly the RUC would have arrested Galvin at any of the many venues the delegation visited, had he been spotted. Indeed, one secret British army surveillance unit near Carrickmore, in County Tyrone, which was uncovered, had written instructions to call for reinforcements if a man fitting Galvin's description was seen in the area.

The organised attack on the march in Andersonstown showed the brutal lengths to which the British were prepared to go in their

*The confusion in the aftermath of the RUC attack, when two other people were reported dead, resulted in John Downes being misnamed Sean, the Christian name of one of those thought to be fatally injured.

attempts to intimidate people from demonstrating and in their attempts to humiliate republicans in what is seen as a republican stronghold. A professional, military and successful arrest of Galvin would have been possible by simply encircling the demonstrators and filtering them through checkpoints and monitoring the Noraid spokesperson's movements after he had addressed the peaceful meeting. The violent assault was deliberately meant to cause chaos and confusion and, as RUC Chief Constable Jack Hermon boasted afterwards in justification, to prevent Galvin from speaking.

"I don't think any Catholic should be surprised if something like this happens to them. These are people who have a state licence to kill."

– Gerry Downes, father of John Downes

REPRESSION

The RUC have had a state licence to repress and, if need be, to kill, since their inception. They, and the loyalist UDR, are the officially armed wing of loyalism.

Britain has used loyalists, the descendants of the original planters, as the pretext for its continuing political and strategic occupation of the six counties. Historically, this relationship has not been one-sided and, in the recent past, loyalists have usually been successful in achieving the demands which they have placed on London – the re-arming and increase in the size of the RUC (and RUC Reserve), the introduction of internment, the end of power-sharing and the 'Ulsterisation' of the forces used against the nationalist community.

While Britain at present may be partially re-appraising that relationship to win more security collaboration from Dublin and to stabilise the situation in its interests, it also acts to appease the loyalists. In recent years there has been the shoot-to-kill policy, the boycott of Sinn Fein elected representatives, the use of paid perjurers in the non-jury show-trials (the use of which against loyalist paramilitaries has caused an outcry), and the RUC assaults on republican funerals such as that on mourners at Volunteer Brendan Watters' funeral in Newry last August.

BAN

In furtherance of this policy of increased repression, direct-ruler James Prior approached the British Home Secretary Leon Brittan in July 1984 with a request to ban Martin Galvin.

Against the advice of the Foreign Office and the British ambassador to Washington, Brittan agreed to the ban and issued an exclusion order on Galvin under the 1971 Immigration Act, a breach of which is merely a summary offence. Given the accusations subsequently levelled against Galvin by RUC chief Hermon, logic would dictate that he should have been banned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The infraction of this act is a serious offence carrying a prison sentence. However, for the sake of political expediency, Brittan used the Immigration Act, which allows no appeal and would have meant Galvin's immediate deportation when apprehended. The British could not afford the embarrassment of an American citizen being imprisoned for a principled act of civil disobedience in the cause of free speech.

The RUC for their part issued a statement to the effect that Galvin would be arrested 'at the most opportune moment'. No-one, not even Galvin, who was obviously committed to breaking this ban, nor the press, who enthusiastically gathered round the platform to photograph him and hear his speech, could have foreseen the measures which the RUC were prepared to take to carry out that arrest, neither could they have foretold the RUC's definition of 'the most opportune moment'.

"How legitimate is it for police to use such violence to arrest someone?"

– Gerry Downes

The Noraid delegation's baptism to British-occupied Ireland came early and bluntly. On crossing the border their tour buses were stopped and searched by RUC men. Clearly, the Americans were to be the subject of continuous harassment and surveillance.

Despite this surveillance, IRA Volunteers in Derry city and in Carrickmore appeared in armed acts of defiance, declaring their commitment to the struggle for freedom and thanking the delegation for their solidarity. The televised Derry appearance was particularly embarrassing to the RUC.

On August 9th, they were followed from Derry to Carrickmore by the RUC Divisional Mobile Support Unit, whose members were responsible for the events in Belfast a few days later. Dozens of heavily-armed RUC men stopped the buses and searched them before allowing them to continue. From the previous day, Carrickmore had been sealed off by the RUC.

The delegation went on to South Armagh, but this time without their RUC 'shadows'.

On Saturday, they attended the funeral of IRA Volunteer Brendan Watters where they were visibly shaken by the viciousness of the RUC attacks. Despite their shock the Americans linked arms with local mourners to protect the coffin on the way to the church.

RALLY

The traditional climax to the anti-internment events is the rally in West Belfast.

After a week of touring republican landmarks and indeed enjoying the hospitality of the people, to say nothing of the local functions, ceilidhe etc, the Americans took their place of honour at the anti-internment march.

Even before the marchers had assembled at Dunville Park on the Falls Road, scores of RUC landrovers were placed along the entire route. Despite this the marchers assembled. As well as Belfast republicans, the Noraid and Troops Out delegations, some Scottish bands were in attendance. Under the hot August sun, dozens of banners had appeared demanding 'Stop the Show Trials', 'No More Paid Perjurers' and 'Troops Out Now'. The delegations also carried their own distinguishing slogans.

"Will Galvin appear?" was the question on most of the marchers' minds.

Despite the heavy RUC presence, the mood was good-humoured as the bands, in colourful array, were slotted into line, each trying to drown out the other. Slowly the march began meandering up the Falls Road on the two-mile journey to Connolly House, Sinn Fein's Belfast headquarters, in Andersonstown. Immediately ahead of the march were four RUC landrovers.

"It's like bloody Dunkirk!" an elderly man remarked as he approached Connolly House. Dozens of RUC and British army jeeps were in place in the immediate area. As the first marchers were marshalled into place in front of the platform, and as the tension mounted, the RUC drew batons and struck several people, only to have stones thrown at them from the roofs of nearby shops. In retaliation, plastic bullets were fired at the young people and immediately Sinn Fein stewards moved in to quell any trouble.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams demanded and secured from the RUC a temporary end to the firing by publicly calling upon the young people not to give the RUC any excuse for disrupting the meeting. That minor incident over, and with the crowd encircled by a ring of armour, the serious business of having a peaceful rally was then attended to.

After several speakers addressed the crowd, Gerry Adams was called. Even as he began his speech RUC men already on the roofs of the shops opposite, loaded up their guns with plastic bullets. Adams, meanwhile, was treating the crowd to some light entertainment, intermittently joking with the appreciative audience. With the people already sitting on the ground, Adams said:

"We have hundreds of heavily-armed RUC men and British

STOP THE SHOW TRIALS
THE TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT OF ENGLAND SCOTLAND
END BRITISH RULE IN IRELAND
CAMDEN TOM
BRITAIN OUT OF
NO MORE SHOW TRIALS
NO MORE PAID PERJURERS

Peaceful march and rally (left), the smiles on people's faces showing the relaxed mood before the attack

In the foreground seated demonstrators applaud a speaker from the Troops Out Movement

soldiers. We have a perfectly peaceful, passive demonstration of people sitting down and we have the press here.

"Now if we act in a disciplined fashion, the RUC and British soldiers will be forced before the cameras of the world's press to expose themselves."

At this remark the crowd broke into laughter, prompting Adams to add:

"Now I don't mean that in any other sense."

After appealing for discipline in the crowd, irrespective of the RUC's demeanour, he added:

"Wouldn't it be a terrible disappointment if Martin Galvin didn't turn up?"

He then added:

"Now to the RUC and to the British soldiers and those in charge, if you want to kill men, women and children, this is your opportunity, because we are not moving. I would like to welcome Martin Galvin of Irish Northern Aid."

"RUC was taking no prisoners."

– Ian Graham, PA Staff reporter in Belfast

In a calculated, premeditated act of barbarism, the RUC, on seeing Martin Galvin on the platform, drove their landrovers into the crowd, while at the same time firing salvo after salvo of plastic bullets into the men, women and children seated on the ground. One English journalist, Richard Ford of *The Times*, described the terrifying scene in these words:

"Mr Galvin was greeted with wild cheering and had just finished waving to the crowd when the police moved in from both ends. They fired plastic bullets into the air and at almost point-blank range into the crowd as they ran over to the crowd, pulling them out of the way and then began driving landrovers into the screaming and hysterical people.

"Appeals for calm went unheard as plastic bullets whirled around. People cowered on the road, clutching children and trying to cover their heads."

Paul Johnson of the *Guardian* was equally vehement in his condemnation of the RUC's behaviour:

"One man died and up to 20 people were injured, four seriously, yesterday, when Belfast police moved into a 3,000-strong crowd, flailing batons and firing plastic bullets with wanton disregard in an effort to capture Mr Martin Galvin...

"As the police moved in, they acted with indiscriminate brutality towards the crowd. Those who tried to flee in panic, or simply cowered on the pavement, were batoned. Plastic bullets were fired from close range, and at specific targets, in contravention of rules governing their use."

RUC LAUGHTER

Continuing, Johnson wrote:

"One photographer was batoned as he stood waving his press card. A teenager lay in a front garden, dazed after being hit a glancing blow by a plastic bullet...

"As police began to move out, laughter could be heard from a group of officers sitting inside their landrovers. Yards away, doctors were trying to revive a critically injured man."

Irish News reporter Letitia Fitzpatrick recorded what she saw:

"Police all over the area began to fire round after round of plastic bullets at the screaming crowd, who crouched in terror unable to run away. A woman's leg was run over by a jeep, and scores of men, women and children were batoned."

As women and children screamed at being batoned, a number of men ran to protect them. Some were batoned themselves, others were pistol-whipped, one was knocked under a jeep and another man used the pole of a banner to fend off the attackers before he was trailed away by four or five RUC men in a storm of baton blows. John Downes apparently picked up a small stick and courageously ran towards a group of RUC men who were firing into the sitting and terrified demonstrators.

As he reached this group, one RUC man carefully took aim, fired, and the round struck his chest in the area of his heart. At a people's public inquiry held by the Springhill Community House a local freelance photographer, James Thompson, told what he saw.

Martin Galvin, just seconds before the bloody assault

He said he had been kneeling on the ground near the shops facing Connolly House, the Sinn Fein headquarters, when he saw a man whom he later discovered was John Downes run past him, with a stick in his hand, to where an RUC man was batoning a man on the ground. Thompson said:

"There was a group of policemen standing there and I saw a fat one hitting a man who was kneeling on the ground on one knee, with his hands up over his head as if to say 'don't hit me'. I saw Sean Downes run towards them with a stick in his hand and it seemed to me that he was running to defend the guy being hit as I'd seen them together earlier.

"Another policeman in the group fired at him from about three or four feet away. Downes seemed to buckle over and then another officer pushed him and he fell into the crowd."

Mr Thompson repeated that the stick that John Downes had was *"to defend that man. It wasn't a big stick, it was a small one that could have been picked up anywhere."*

Minutes after John Downes was shot, Michael Reilly was shot by an RUC plastic bullet from a distance of two metres. He recalls:

"When the RUC charged I ran into Connolly House to shelter from the plastic bullets. I ran into a room full of women and kids and as the RUC fired plastic bullets at the windows and battered the door, we threw ourselves over the women and kids to protect them.

"The RUC booted their way into the building and then into the room. I was pulled off the terrified women and children, a small boy still clinging to me. I was led outside at the point of a plastic bullet gun. I believed I was going to be killed. I shouted to the RUC to leave the women and kids alone.

"I was led outside where a white-shirted RUC man told me to get across the road to the shops opposite. I crouched and ran over and lay down.

"I noticed a line of RUC men about 10 yards from me, firing plastic bullets down the street where the Allied Irish Bank is situated. This group then turned towards us and ordered us to stand up. As I stood up I was immediately hit on the face with a plastic bullet.

"The next thing I remember was some people standing over me and a tremendous amount of blood going down my throat. Some priest asked me to confess my sins. I suppose he was giving me the Last Rites.

"I was eventually taken to hospital but not before the doctors had tried to revive Sean Downes. I was in a semi-conscious state by this time.

"My next clear memory is waking up in the intensive care unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital on a life-support machine and being unable to breathe. I wrote, with the assistance of a nurse, that I couldn't breathe and she got a doctor who gave me some oxygen. Another doctor said to me 'You are a very lucky man; another inch higher and you were dead'.

"I was released from hospital on Thursday. I had received eleven stitches. My jaw is broken in three places and shattered at the point of impact, below my right ear. I now have blinding headaches at night and a numbness in my chin and lower lip.

"I was not rioting, no-one was. I was shot for absolutely no reason."

CHILDREN

As casualties mounted, the women and children in Connolly House were being subjected to a horrendous experience. Mrs Louis Hartley describes the scene after Michael Reilly was pulled out:

"When my four children and myself arrived, plastic bullets were already being fired, so I took them into Connolly House for protection.

"When Martin Galvin appeared and the plastic bullets began to fly, everyone panicked and we threw the children under a table. They included a three-month-old child and a wee girl who had had a heart operation, she was only five.

"I was terrified. I threw myself on top of my young ones. All the time plastic bullets kept banging off the windows. Some Sinn Fein members said to calm down as they would not come in when they knew it was only women and children.

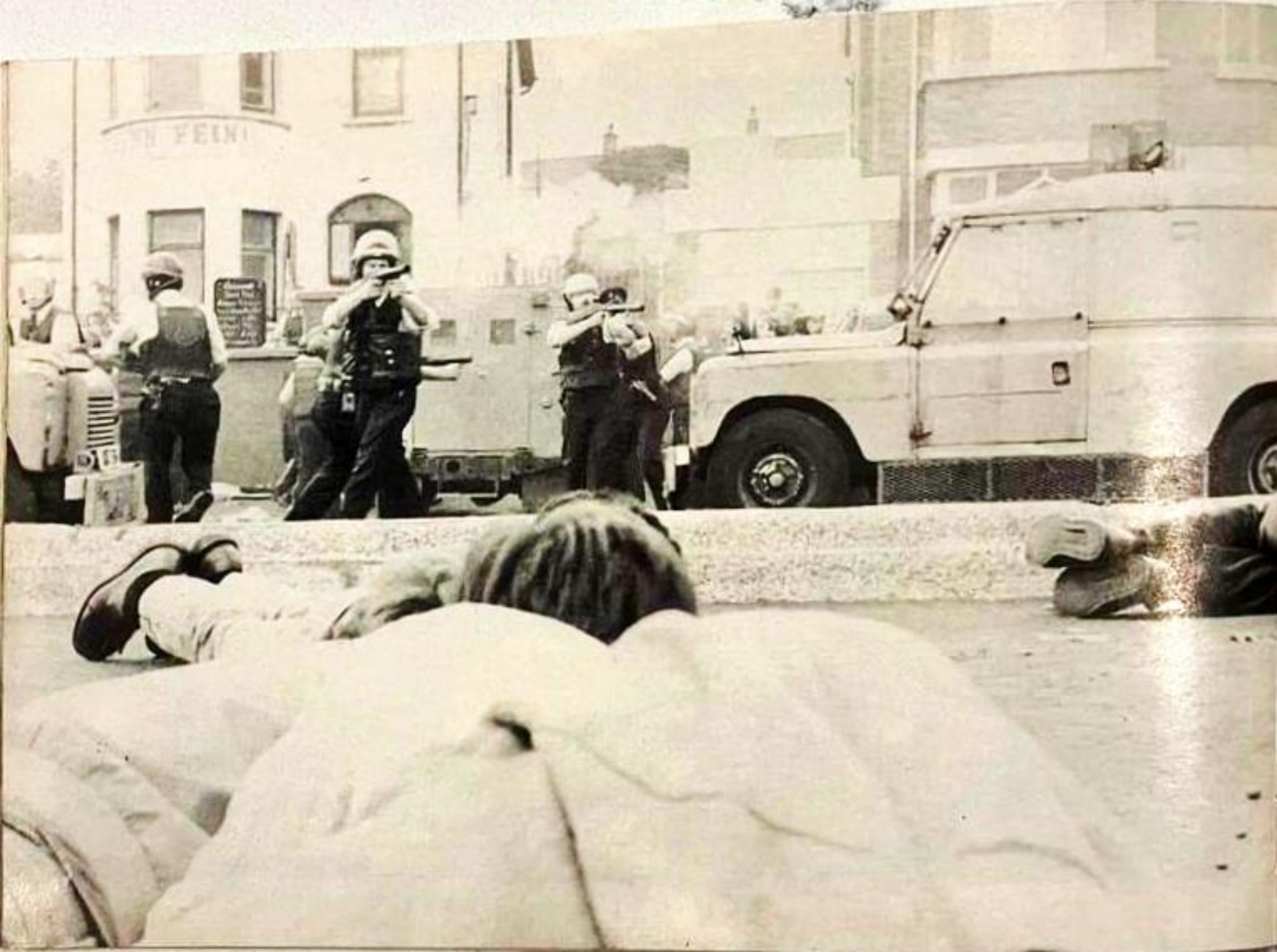
"Next minute the door was booted in, one man was flung against

WDI 5190

John Downes' killer takes aim and a second later fatally wounds him

Numerous attempts were made to resuscitate the fatally-wounded John Downes

Fr Maurice Burke whispers an Act of Contrition into the ear of the dying John Downes



the wall, the others were pushed, kicked and battered out the door. We were screaming and the kids were screaming. We screamed that there were kids under the table but one RUC man kept jumping up and down on it.

"I remember thinking that if the table breaks he'll kill one of my children. We pulled the kids out and sat them down. An RUC officer then screamed 'Get those fucking bastards out of here'.

"They started pulling at us. A blonde girl in front of me was trailed out by the hair and her young daughter became hysterical. When he pulled that girl, he stepped back and hit my seven-year-old son on the head with his baton. This brought me round a bit. I remember lifting my youngest son and two men lifted two of my other children. I was completely stunned, I was moving but I couldn't feel it. My mouth was so dry I couldn't speak, I was so terrified for my children's safety."

Lucy Murray, a Twinbrook woman who was also in the room along with her 10-year-old daughter Sharon, recalled:

"We all lay down on the floor with the children and tried to take cover under a table; everyone was crying and screaming. They burst into the room like madmen and they trampled over us, shouting at us to get out. We said we wouldn't as we would only get killed, and at that they dragged one woman, who had three or four children, outside screaming.

"I was next. They wrenched me from Sharon, who was hysterical, and threw me into the landrover, punching me."

Twenty-six-year-old Jim Duffy from Andersonstown was struck twice with plastic bullets, once on the back of the head and several minutes later on his left arm which he was using to shield the head of his twenty-five-year-old girlfriend Kathleen Livingstone. Kathleen's sister Julie was killed by a British army plastic bullet in May 1981.

His recollections were graphically descriptive:

"I could see them charging and shooting and the batons going. There was no rioting whatsoever. I could see smoke coming from their guns and their batons used in all directions as they charged people that were sitting down.

"They just ran amok. I couldn't believe it. I remember saying 'Jesus look at this', and I just started towards Kathleen to say let's get out of here when I was hit high on the back of the head. It felt like everything in the back of my head was moving forward. I thought both my eyes were going to pop out... I thought it was lights out. I fell then."

Jim believes he was hit by an RUC man from the roof of the Build-U-Rite shop which was a considerable distance away.

Perhaps Kathleen Livingstone summed up the feelings of most of those present when she said:

"I don't know, you've gone through things since 1969, our family was burnt out by loyalists from our house in Dover Street, but I've never seen anything like it, so much panic and terror.

"There was the smell of blood everywhere, they were hungry for it. It was a massacre, it was an absolute, unprovoked massacre."

PRESS & POLITICAL REACTION

As is normal practice in cases of RUC or British army excesses, the press look to share responsibility between the British forces and the Republican Movement. The *Irish Independent*, the pro-Fine Gael paper, castigated the RUC for 'playing straight into the hands of those most ruthless of terrorists, the Provisional IRA'. Other papers claimed that Gerry Adams in his introduction of Martin Galvin, or Galvin's appearance itself, had provoked the RUC. However pro-establishment the paper, no-one could deny that the RUC had murdered one man and wounded many others in attempting to arrest Martin Galvin and that they had failed to effect that arrest. The most potent comment came from the *Guardian* which said that the RUC had 'thus confirmed in an afternoon the prejudice which years have been spent in contradicting'.

The *Daily Mirror* called again, in a special edition, for Britain to withdraw from the North. Meanwhile, the *Irish News* said that:

"Twelve years after the imposition of direct rule, Catholics have no confidence in the forces of law and order, in the judiciary and in those who govern."

Loyalist politicians were extremely pleased with the RUC

Twenty-six-year old Michael Reilly who was taken out of Connolly House by the RUC before being shot

Shoes and sandals picked up after the baton charge

NO ROOM FOR DISSENT

REPUBLICAN and Civil Rights marchers have always been viewed by the RUC and loyalists as threats to the six-county state. However, any dissent, such as the limited unity between Catholics and Protestants in Belfast during the Outdoor Relief Riots in 1932, was put down brutally. The Unionist government was alarmed to see Protestant and Catholic workers uniting against the Unionist hierarchy and all meetings were banned under the Special Powers Act. When crowds went ahead and assembled, the RUC, strongly reinforced for the occasion, was sent in. In the Protestant areas of the city, they baton-charged the crowds. But in the Catholic ghettoes they fired over the heads of the demonstrators and a full-scale riot broke out with barricades being erected and defended in the Falls Road area for three days.

The Unionist government whipped up sectarian fears by alleging a republican/communist conspiracy. In November 1933, a Catholic publican was shot dead in York Street, Belfast, the first sectarian murder since 1922. More killings were to follow.

ANTI-PARTITION

When the Anti-Partition League stood for the Stormont elections in 1949, nationalist rallies and marches were banned under the Special Powers Act. In 1954 the Flags and Emblems Act was passed which made it illegal to interfere with the display of the Union Jack and empowered the RUC to seize any flag or emblem that they considered might lead to a breach of the peace. This act is used weekly by the RUC to remove Tricolours and to confiscate, for example, Spirit of Freedom badges from young people in the centre of Belfast.

On August 19th 1954, when Tyrone republican Liam Kelly (who had been elected to Stormont and appointed to the Dublin senate) was released from a term of imprisonment for 'sedition' a large crowd welcomed him in his home town of Pomeroy. The RUC baton-charged men and women in an attempt to take possession of the Tricolour.

In the 1964 general election, Paisley threatened to march to the Falls Road and remove a Tricolour which was displayed in the window of the Sinn Fein election offices in Divis Street. On September 28th, the RUC seized the Tricolour. The next evening about 2,000 republicans gathered outside the Divis Street office, singing resistance songs and calling for the Tricolour to be replaced.

When it was displayed on September 30th, a large crowd defended it against the RUC. Spurred on by demands and threats from Paisley, the RUC arrived in force and rioting erupted with the RUC baton-charging the crowd. Over 60 civilians and 21 RUC men were hospitalised and around 50 republicans were arrested.

In the early days of the civil rights marches (for which statutory notice was given) in 1968 and 1969, the RUC relied upon Paisley declaring counter-demonstrations so that they could ban both.

In 1968, the RUC baton-charged peaceful demonstrators in Duke Street, Derry; in January 1969, they joined with cudgel-wielding 'B' Specials and loyalists to beat up the student People's Democracy march at Burntollet; and in April 1969, when the RUC invaded the Bogside, they inflicted fatal injuries on Sammy Devenny as he sat in his living-room.

In August 1969, 'B' Specials shot dead John Gallagher during a civil rights meeting in Armagh city.

Other protests were also baton-charged but it was against the demonstrations in protest against the use of internment that the most brutal attack came on January 30th 1972, in Derry, when British paratroopers shot dead 14 civilians and wounded a large number of others.

Anti-internment demonstrations – like that organised by the Political Hostages Release Committee – which attempted to march beyond the ghetto areas, were batoned and gassed, with rubber bullets being fired at marchers. A PHRC march to Long Kesh along the M1 motorway was stopped after a short distance. A similar march by the National Smash H-Block/Armagh Committee in January 1980 was stopped on the Stewartstown Road barely 300 yards out of Andersonstown. Yet the Orange Order is allowed to triumphantly parade through nationalist areas and towns throughout the six counties and

The RUC in 1968

The RUC in 1984

any objectors soon find themselves in court on trumped-up riotous behaviour charges.

Only one nationalist march has ever been allowed through Belfast city centre and that was organised by the Trade Union Campaign Against Repression group, in May 1978, to protest against the killing of Brian Maguire in Castlereagh Interrogation Centre. The group filed for permission to march and the RUC reluctantly agreed to the route.

Even attempts by republicans to give the RUC no pretext for attacking their marches has come to nought. For example, until a few years ago the traditional August anti-internment demonstration in West Belfast was a march from the Busy Bee to Dunville Park. But because of trouble with the British army and the RUC at Springfield Road corner, below the barracks and close to Dunville Park, the route was reversed so that the rallying point – the Busy Bee/Connolly House area – was a quiet area, free of provocation and not a barracks in sight.

However, on August 12th 1984, RUC men from barracks as far away as Springfield Road, Grosvenor Road, Andersonstown Road and Suffolk Road, travelled whatever miles necessary to join with their sectarian colleagues of the Divisional Mobile Support Unit to break up a peaceful demonstration at Connolly House and to kill John Downes in the process.

attack and called an emergency meeting of the Stormont Assembly which passed a vote of confidence in its conduct. They were outraged by media coverage and by the admission by direct-ruler James Prior that the ban on Galvin was probably 'a bad mistake'.

Paisley demonstrated a chilling contempt for the dead and wounded that will linger in nationalist memory for many years. About the shootings he said:

"Those who irresponsibly brought their children and their grannies to spectate at this event, came because they wanted to revel in the flouting of the law and they have only themselves to blame if they were caught up in the ensuing trouble."

In a TV-am interview Paisley's deputy, Peter Robinson, shocked viewers by justifying the attack by describing the women and children (some of whom were as young as four months) as 'sympathisers of the IRA, if not members'.

Again in the Assembly debate the DUP showed little restraint. Peter Robinson said that if John Downes had been standing still and not running when the bullet hit him he would not have died.

Another member gleefully remarked:

"He's standing still now."

A call for an independent public inquiry came from the British Labour leader Neil Kinnock, Liberal leader David Steel (who called the RUC attacks a 'police riot'), Fianna Fail, and the Alliance Party, the SDLP and Bishop Cahal Daly who could not leave off attacking Sinn Fein.

Joe Hendron of the SDLP said:

"Noraid have now got the sort of propaganda they wanted."

Shirley Williams, president of the Social Democratic Party, said there could be no justification for the killing of John Downes and added:

"Not since Peterloo in 1819 have British police shot people dead at a peaceful meeting."

Bishop Daly (and Fr Sean McCartney officiating at the funeral service) criticised the RUC, not on moral grounds – indeed morality was not even brought into it – but on tactical grounds, that is, it tarnishes the image of the RUC and makes 'the benefits' of British imperialism and their law and order more difficult to sell.

The day after the RUC attack on the rally, Sinn Fein held a special press conference and declared that they would be marching again that night along the same route in a silent black flag demonstration in honour of John Downes and to demonstrate their right to free speech and free assembly. Gerry Adams read out a statement to the press conference which said:

"No matter what they (the British government) *or the RUC say, it cannot disguise the fact that Martin Galvin is guilty of no capital offence, only of expressing an opinion.*

"He was excluded for that reason – to prevent him from expressing his opinion. The RUC, on British government orders, attacked a peaceful rally."

RUC LIES

The RUC's attempts to justify their unprovoked attacks were patently exposed as lies. Their account of the death of John Downes, claiming he was a rioter, then saying that he was hit by a ricocheting plastic bullet, were refuted without doubt, and his possession of a small stick does not affect the overall issue of the RUC's authorised onslaught.

It was only after their hostile press conference that RUC Chief Constable Jack Hermon – shocked that the RUC version was not being accepted in the usual docile fashion by a press corps who, for a change, had almost been murdered – announced an internal inquiry.

MARCH OF DEFIANCE

Throughout Monday, August 13th, cars toured republican areas of Belfast loud-hailing people to come out that night and to march and defy the RUC's bloody attempts at intimidation.

That evening thousands gathered at Dunville Park where, the day before, John Downes had stood with his wife and child waiting to fall in behind the banners and to take part in the anti-internment march. The atmosphere was filled with a mixture of fear and anger and a spirit of defiance. It could be seen in the faces of young and old alike. There were people who had not marched since civil rights days, who had not marched since internment

Black-flag march making its way along the Falls Road

days, who had not marched since the hunger-strikes.

An RUC inspector in a landrover drove up and declared it an 'illegal march' but his words were drowned out in a chorus of jeers.

Slowly the marchers retraced the route of the previous day; thousands upon thousands of silent, dignified protestors, each reflecting on the previous day's events.

At Connolly House, hundreds of stewards guided the marchers into place. So huge was the crowd that the first arrivals had to wait for thirty minutes until all the marchers reached Connolly House.

After reading out the names of all those who died as a result of rubber and plastic bullets, Barbara Brown of Sinn Fein's Belfast Comhairle Ceantair introduced Fr Maurice Burke who read out a message from Martin Galvin. Galvin's message read:

"Yesterday, when I climbed on to the platform, I was genuinely overcome with emotion and couldn't speak when I saw the thousands of people – the men, women and children – cheering and applauding our simple act of civil disobedience.

"What was to follow were several attempts of premeditated murder by the RUC which left Sean Downes dead and several others seriously injured. To his young widow Brenda, to their baby Clare, to Sean's mother and father and brothers and sisters, may I offer my sincere condolences on their sad loss, and my particular personal grief as my arrest was declared the objective of the RUC's murderous rampage.

"Tonight, on television, we witnessed RUC Chief Constable Jack Hermon castigate eye-witness journalists for daring to question his second-hand account of events. He boasted 'Galvin didn't get speaking', when the real issue was your right to free assembly, your right to free speech."

Galvin then went on to praise the courage of the nationalist people and declared that the RUC 'for all their murder, slunk from this road as defeated bullies'.

Finally, Gerry Adams addressed the crowd:

"Tonight isn't the night for long speeches. We have had a peaceful demonstration, and the reason why our demonstration is peaceful is very, very obvious – there are no men of violence here."

Adams then went on to say:

"We haven't got the weapons of war – the British army and RUC have – and yesterday when it came to us proclaiming our right to free speech we used our bodies to defend that right. And Sean Downes bought that right for us with his life."

Adams then attacked the bishops who call on republicans to support the status quo and the Southern politicians who hand over political fugitives to the RUC.

He ended his speech with the password of the blanketmen, *"Tiocfaidh ar la!"* (Our day will come!)

PRIOR ADMITS MISTAKE

As national and international condemnation poured down on the RUC and the British government, direct-ruler James Prior broke off his holiday and returned to London. In a press interview Prior admitted that the banning of Martin Galvin now looked to have been *"a bad mistake"* and a *"great setback for the RUC"*. Taking full responsibility, he called on the press *"not to make the IRA's case for them"* which translated into lay person's terms means 'do not report what you saw, do not report what really happened, moderate your accounts of events'.

No sooner had he admitted his mistake, than an unrepentant Chief Constable Jack Hermon contradicted Prior, saying:

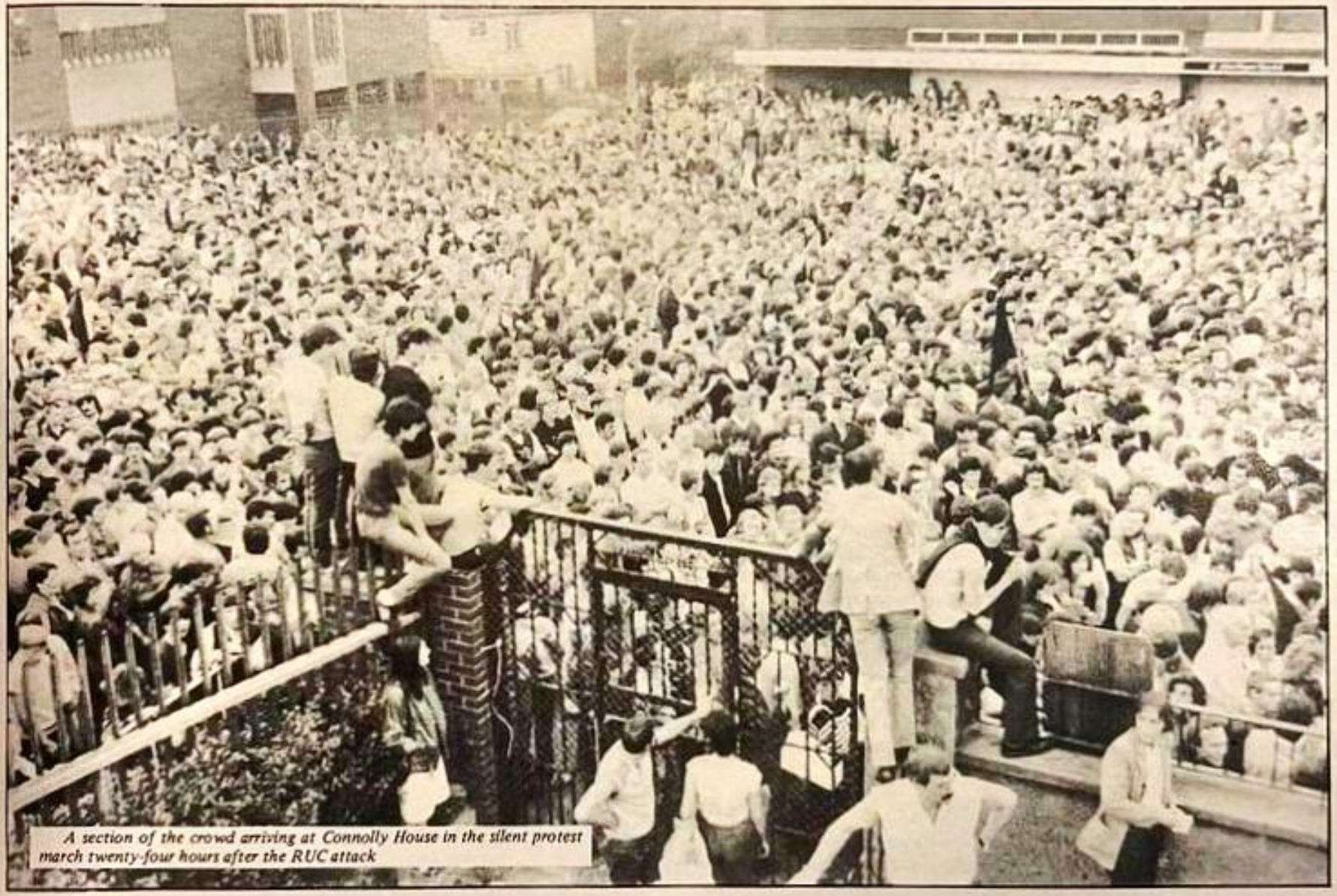
"I do not have any doubt in my mind as to the rightness of that decision" (to exclude Galvin).

To the bitter end Hermon was standing behind his storm-troopers.

DUBLIN

The Free State government and its Foreign Affairs Minister, Peter Barry, the self-styled guarantors of the security of the nationalist people in the North, issued a statement expressing 'concern' at the incidents. But when British opposition politicians and Bishop Cahal Daly called for an independent public inquiry, just how concerned the Free State government was became clear.

In a second statement, the Dublin government disassociated



A section of the crowd arriving at Connolly House in the silent protest march twenty-four hours after the RUC attack

THE PLASTIC BULLET

A PLASTIC BULLET is a solid PVC cylinder weighing 135 grammes, 36mm in diameter, with a length of 99mm. They are described by the British army as anti-riot batons (either L3A1 or L5A2). The Webley-Schermly anti-riot gun, from which the baton rounds are fired, is as accurate as a high-quality shot-gun.

While the plastic bullet replaced the rubber bullet as the main anti-riot projectile following the deaths of three people up to 1973, it did not become fully operational until 1975. The plastic bullet is manufactured by Brock's Explosives Ltd, of Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire.

Plastic bullets have been known to be 'doctored' by Brits/RUC, either by sharpening them or affixing the jagged edges of metal bottletops which rip off the skin on impact and inflict more serious damage.

Both rubber and plastic bullets were developed in Porton, the British germ warfare centre, from wooden 'broomstick' rounds which the Hong Kong police used in the riots of 1958. (A girl demonstrator was killed.)

The wooden 'broomstick' rounds quickly became dubbed 'baton rounds' and they gave off a whistling sound while in flight which brought fear to demonstrators. They had a tendency to split on impact, thus scattering splinters in all directions. Even then the British government, while considering them acceptable for the oppressed of Hong Kong, ironically ruled them out as *"too dangerous"* for rebellious nationalists in the six counties.

REFORM

The introduction of the rubber bullet coincided with the short-lived policy of reform instigated by James Callaghan which was doomed from the beginning. Up until 1974, approximately 55,000

rubber bullets were fired leaving three people dead: Francis Rowntree, aged 11½; Tobias Molloy, aged 18; and Thomas Friel, aged 21.

Most deaths inflicted by the plastic bullet have been at ranges of 20 yards or less, often as a result of being hit on the head. The plastic bullet is not bounced as the rubber bullet should have been and is quite accurate.

The long-range L3A1 version is meant to compensate for loss of impact over the greater distance required to counter stone-throwers, but the weapon is invariably fired well below the recommended 'safe' limit. It has a muzzle velocity of 200mph.

US army laboratory tests have shown that *"severe damage"* will result if the impact of energy is higher than 90 foot-lbs. The stated effective range of the weapon is 36-72 yards, even though at 50 yards the energy is 110 foot-lbs.

So, when fired at the British army's medium effective range, the impact of a plastic bullet is well above the *"severe damage"* limit.

SUPPOSED RULES OF FIRE

General

1. Baton rounds may be used to disperse a crowd whenever it is judged to be minimum and reasonable force in the circumstances.

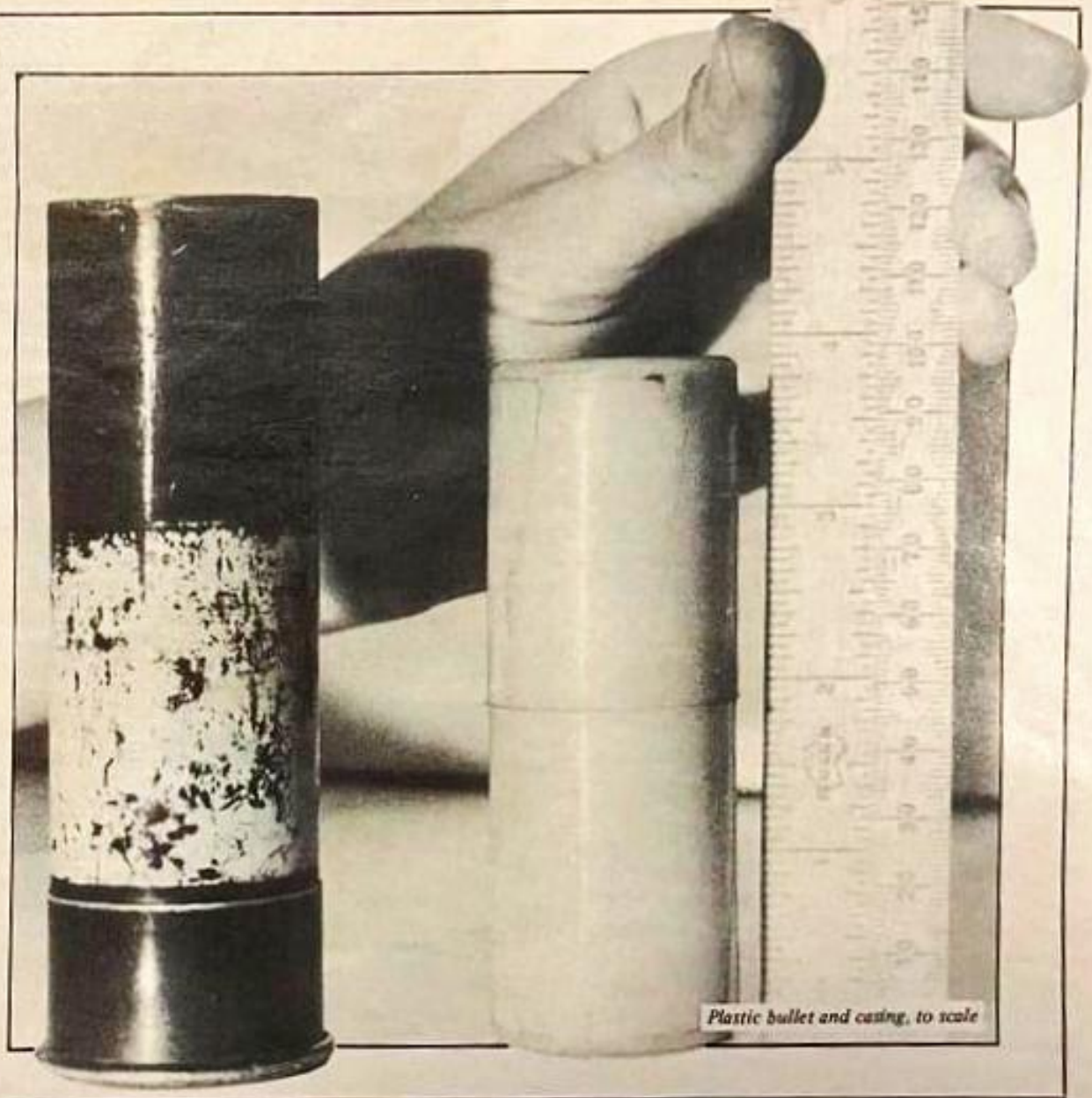
2. The rounds must be fired at selected persons and not indiscriminately at the crowd. They should be aimed so that they strike the lower part of the target's body directly (i.e. without bouncing).

Additional Rules for the 25 Grain PVC Baton Round

3. The authority to use these rounds is delegated to the commander on the spot.

4. Rounds must be fired at a range of not less than 20 metres except when the safety of soldiers or others is seriously threatened.

5. The baton round was designed and produced to disperse crowds. It can also be used to prevent an escape from HM Prisons if it is, in the circumstances, still considered to constitute the use of minimum and reasonable force. If a prisoner can be apprehended by hand, the baton must not be used.



Plastic bullet and casing, to scale

itself from the inquiry calls but sought instead a comprehensive British response to the Forum report. Whilst there is no such thing as an 'independent' inquiry, both the Dublin Coalition and the British government (which turned down an inquiry) knew that such an inquiry would have opened a can of worms about the ruthlessness of British political policy and would have seriously demoralised the RUC.

In the past, the Dublin Coalition has vainly protested to the British about the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Drumadd Barracks (base of some UDR men charged with assassinating nationalists); about the revelations in the Robinson case that undercover RUC men were monitoring the movements of two INLA Volunteers in County Monaghan (shortly before the RUC murdered them in Armagh city); and about Judge Gibson's congratulatory acquittal remarks to the RUC men who gunned down three unarmed IRA Volunteers.

Dublin has also introduced extradition-by-stealth of political fugitives and said that Noraid visitors were not welcome in the twenty-six counties. For all its boot-licking it has received little or no political favours from Britain in response. The growing perception of its toadyism, whilst annoying to the Coalition government, is a long way off from limiting its collaboration.

Meanwhile, the British government rode out the political storm and James Prior has returned to Britain, his tenure as direct-ruler having been completed.

Plastic bullets, which have not been used against demonstrators or rioters in Britain, have been again fired in several incidents in the North – at an Ancient Order of Hibernians' march in Magherafelt, at nationalist spectators of a football match in Belfast and at nationalists in Castlederg, County Tyrone, who repelled a drunken loyalist mob attempting to invade a Catholic part of the town.

When rioting erupted on the Shankill Road in Belfast in August, the RUC at first refused to use plastic bullets. Sinn Fein pointed out this sectarian discrimination but stated that they were just as opposed to the firing of plastic bullets at loyalists. However, when the riots ensued over consecutive nights, the RUC cynically used them to demonstrate a non-existent 'impartiality'.

A *Sunday Tribune* reporter who interviewed senior RUC officers wrote in the paper on August 26th:

"The riots which occurred the following week in the Shankill were a bit of a coup for the force.

"It worked to the RUC's advantage to be seen to be attacked by Protestants... Because of the Downes affair the RUC had their backs to the wall so there was the opportunity to put the boot in..." the reporter was told at the RUC's Knock headquarters in Belfast.

AUTHORISED BRUTALITY

The storming of the peaceful rally in Belfast on August 12th, including the use of batons and plastic bullets against men, women and children, was authorised at cabinet level by the British government and was undertaken by the RUC with a sectarian fervour which republicans have consistently maintained is the principal feature of the force.

The death of John Downes and the scenes of that Bloody Sunday were reminiscent of the RUC's baton charge on peaceful demonstrators in Derry's Duke Street on October 5th, 1968.

If any good can come out of John Downes' death it will be to open the eyes of the people of Ireland, of the British public and of the world to the ongoing repression needed to maintain the six-county state.

That repression is being used in a futile but bloody attempt to make nationalists accept second-class citizenship and British rule. And if determination-to-be-free needed to be demonstrated it was shown by the thousands who defiantly marched in honour of John Downes on August 13th, by those who paid their respects at his funeral and by those republicans who marched against internment, against the H-Blocks and who will march against the British occupation of Ireland until the Union Jack is removed from Irish soil.

'MINIMU

FRANCIS ROWNTREE (11½)
Belfast
April 23rd 1972

TOBIAS MOLLOY (18)
Strabane
July 16th 1972

THOMAS FRIEL (21)
Derry
May 22nd 1973

STEPHEN GEDDIS (10)
Belfast
August 30th 1975

BRIAN STEWART (13)
Belfast
October 10th 1976

MICHAEL DONNELLY (21)
Belfast
August 9th 1980

PAUL WHITTERS (15)
Derry
April 25th 1981

JULIE LIVINGSTONE (14)
Belfast
May 13th 1981

CAROL ANN KELLY (12)
Belfast
May 22nd 1981

HENRY DUFFY (45)
Derry
May 22nd 1981

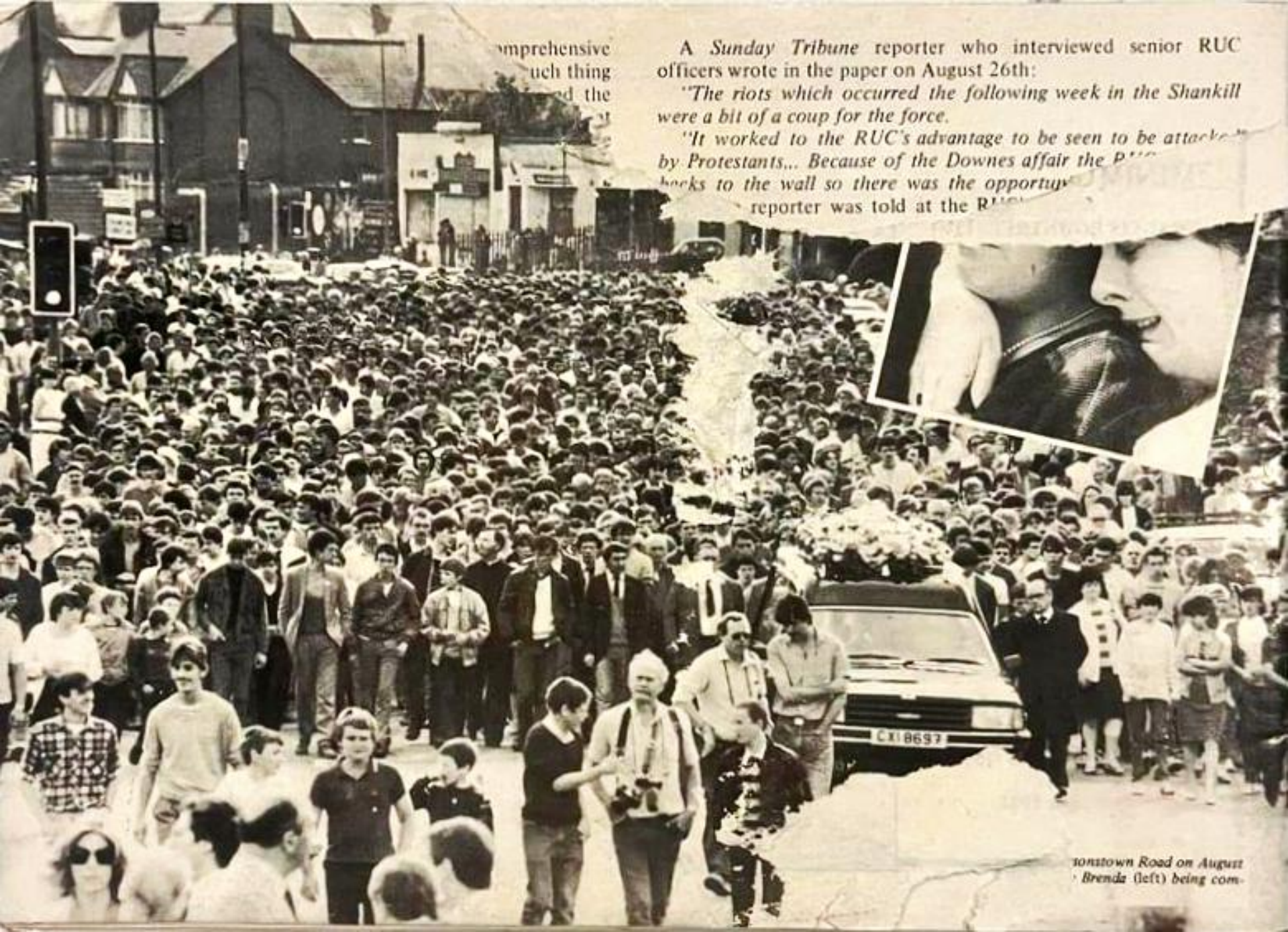
NORA McCABE (30)
Belfast
July 9th 1981

PETER DOHERTY (37)
Belfast
July 31st 1981

PETER McGUINNESS (40)
Belfast
August 9th 1981

STEPHEN McCONOMY (11)
Derry
April 19th 1982

JOHN DOWNES (22)
Belfast
August 12th 1984



...mprehensive
...uch thing
...d the
...t

A *Sunday Tribune* reporter who interviewed senior RUC officers wrote in the paper on August 26th:

"The riots which occurred the following week in the Shankill were a bit of a coup for the force.

"It worked to the RUC's advantage to be seen to be attacked by Protestants... Because of the Downes affair the P... backs to the wall so there was the opportu...

... reporter was told at the R...

...onstown Road on August
... Brenda (left) being com-